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ABSTRACT

In the context of increasing criticism of bilingual education and the use of native language instruction, it must be remembered that they are based on a sound rationale. First, they address the need for continued learning as the child moves from one language to the other. Second, they address the need to diminish the alienation which children feel when pushed into an unfamiliar language situation and to develop a positive self-concept. And third, they recognize the importance of new discoveries about the critical role of language acquisition and utilization in the intellectual development of the child. Despite overwhelming pedagogical evidence in favor of bilingual education and native language instruction, however, criticism continues unabated. The criticism can be put into three categories: (1) emotional--negative reactions to the use of a language other than English in American schools; (2) misinformational; and (3) attitudinal--based on past discriminatory attitudes about the place of racial and ethnic minorities and the belief held by some that equal educational opportunity is not desirable. None of the proposed alternatives, however, based as they are on the traumatic and disastrous programs of the pre-bilingual era are acceptable. Bilingual education with language instruction in the native language still appears to be the best option for children with limited English proficiency. (CMG)

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INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
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THE ROLE OF NATIVE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

by José A. Cárdenas, Ed.D.

There are few public issues today which produce such a range of diverse reactions as does bilingual education. Proponents for bilingual educational programs are strong and loud in their demands for it; opponents are equally adamant against it. The reasons for support or opposition are so varied that one tends to lose sight of a pedagogical rationale in the heat of emotional, patriotic, racial, and other arguments. Criticisms of bilingual education stem from every type of person and for every conceivable reason. Noel Epstein coined a new phrase, "affirmative ethnicity," to voice his opposition. Others criticize the violation of the official national language (there is none in this country), the dangers of language minority separatism, unwillingness to learn and speak the English language, and the undesirable need for a crutch in the American and English language culture. One even hears the perennial resurrection of the totally discredited "Interference Theory" (if they are allowed to speak their native language, it will interfere with the learning of English).

An uninformed observer would venture that part of the problem is the failure of proponents of bilingual education to present an adequate rationale, but such a viewpoint would be extremely naive. The rationale has been presented again and again in educational articles, in the media, in court decisions, and in legislation. The fact is that opponents of bilingual education seldom seem to go beyond the title in the formulation of negative responses. Opponents of bilingual education seldom use an accurate definition, a fair description, or factual information. In most cases the emotional response overshadows all rational considerations.

Yet it would be remiss to allow those who peruse press releases, news coverage, and letters to the editor to form negative concepts on the basis of information presented solely by opponents of bilingual education. For that reason I am again presenting some arguments in favor of bilingual education and the educational reasons for the temporary use of native language instruction in bilingual education programs.

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The Evolution of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education came into favor as an alternative program in the late 1960s. Persons not around the educational scene in those days, and persons who were around but have short memories, need to be informed or reminded of the educational scenario at the advent of bilingual education.

My first contact with second language development occurred much earlier than that. In the middle 1930s, I was placed in an all-English first grade instructional program without an adequate knowledge of the English language. I still remember it as a traumatic experience. It was not an uncomfortable, unpleasant, or challenging situation, but rather a traumatic, disconcerting, terrorizing type of experience. This type of educational methodology can best be described as a sink-or-swim approach. A student either learned the English language fast and swam, or he failed to do so and sank. A recent newspaper article points out that some of us swam. That is true, but demographic evidence shows that over 80 percent sank. Furthermore, of the few that did not sink, many of them never really learned to swim; they just stayed in the water, not sinking, but unable to swim out.

A student either learned the English language fast and swam, or he failed to do so and sank. A recent newspaper article points out that some of us swam. That is true, but demographic evidence shows that over 80 percent sank.

It is interesting to note that those who swam grew up, almost without exception, in homes with strong language capability. Though this capability was usually in a language other than English, an unusually good language ability was present during the developmental years. This is as true for language minority persons in the past who grew up to become congressmen, mayors, educators, and successful businessmen, as it is today for the Korean or Vietnamese children who are graduating as valedictorians. The common denominator invariably is extensive utilization competence in some language. Another personally significant event occurred in the early 1950s, when I worked as a teacher, supervisor, and principal in Texas public schools. The performance of limited English proficient children in classes I taught constituted another traumatic experience. These children, who in any other way would be classified as normal, were unable to perform the most basic classroom activities. I joined the thousands of other teachers who experienced the frustration that, in spite of dedication, commitment, caring, and hard work, the instruction of language minority children did not produce the same type of performance we

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took for granted with nonminority children.

Another memory pertains to the implementation of structured English language programs in the early 1960s. The main difference between this approach and the earlier sink-or-swim approach was that a concerted effort was made at introducing the English language in a structured, nonthreatening context. As a result of this approach, the trauma of an early elementary transition to a new language was reduced, though it is difficult to claim that this new methodology was clearly successful. Though the approach was vastly superior, it was evident that the child would suffer from cognitive discontinuity as basic and content learning were deferred until the student demonstrated a certain level of English language mastery. It became common educational practice to postpone cognitive activities until English mastery had been established, but children in such programs were commonly one calendar year behind their English speaking counterparts and the development deficit tended to grow in subsequent years, rather than to be reduced or eliminated.

By 1966 the frustrations associated with the instruction of limited English proficient children were intolerable for many. Language minority children were dropping out of school at rates higher than 80 percent. Their performance as measured by standardized tests indicated achievement levels at an average of two grade levels below expectancy norms, and the English language programs had not met the anticipated promise. In addition, the civil rights movement had awakened the interests of minorities regarding the education of their children. Students and parents alike were demanding improved educational opportunities while educators were at their wit's end in trying to cope with the growing pressures.

It is not sufficient to say that the bilingual approach was accepted in the late 1960s. It was welcomed, it was embraced, it was grasped as the proverbial straw which could prevent the continued drowning of limited English proficient children in the dark waters of our elementary and secondary schools.

The compensatory education programs of the late sixties and early seventies did little for language minority children. This was to have been expected because such compensatory programs seldom went beyond giving students more of the inadequate programs of the fifties. The same methodologies which ill-served them six hours a day for nine months a year were extended for a couple of hours a day and the remaining three months of the year.

Thus it was that a group of concerned educators began to speak about alternative teaching strategies. One such program which surfaced at the time was a bilingual approach for the teaching of limited English proficient children. It is not sufficient to say that the bilingual approach was accepted in the late 1960s. It was welcomed, it was embraced, it was grasped as the proverbial straw which could prevent the continued drowning of limited English proficient children in the dark waters of our elementary and secondary schools. The existing situation using the traditional all English approach, which is now being widely recommended as a new "alternative," was so bad that anything different was worth trying.

Rationale for Bilingual Education

The original concept of utilizing a child's native language for instructional purposes while English was being learned as a second language was based primarily on the need for continued learning as the child moved from one language to another. Limited familiarity with the new language made it tenuous to attempt to develop reading skills without assurance that a sufficient mastery of the new language enabled the child to understand what was being read. The same was true in the acquisition of mathematical concepts and learning in the various content fields.

The advent of bilingual programs with native language instruction indicated to the language minority child a new sense of acceptance. The school appeared to be saying, "I accept your language, therefore I accept you. I accept your language, I accept your heritage, your culture, your family, your ethnicity."

A second consideration was the need to diminish the alienation which children frequently faced when pushed into an unfamiliar language situation. Not only will use of the native language lessen the trauma of language transition, but the use of the native language does much to develop or maintain a positive concept of self. The advent of bilingual programs with native language instruction indicated to the language minority child a new sense of acceptance. The school appeared to be saying, "I accept your language, therefore I accept you. I accept your language, I accept your heritage, your culture, your family, your ethnicity." In contrast to previous school experiences, the language minority child received a feeling of acceptance, worth, and self-esteem seldom experienced before.

I have seen several recent newspaper items which state that a positive self-concept should be the outcome of successful learning. In reality there is a cyclic relationship

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between input and outcome. A negative self-concept is detrimental to learning, which in turn strengthens the negative concept, etc. This produces a cumulative deficit phenomenon which leads children caught in this cycle to do worse and worse in school. On the other hand, a positive concept of self contributes to successful performance which leads to an improved self-concept and more successful performance.

There is a third reason for the use of a native language in bilingual programs that received little recognition in the past, but now looms as the most important consideration. The use of language is imperative to the intellectual development of the child. The extent to which a person develops an intellectual capacity is very much dependent on the extent of language acquisition and utilization. This is not the same as the amount which an individual learns, but rather the amount of capability for learning which is developed.

Bruce Gaarder, an early advocate of bilingual education in the middle sixties, used an effective analogy to illustrate this point. He compared the use of language to a window through which a person interacts with the environment. The interaction with the environment through this "window" of language provides the experiences which produce learning. The bigger the window, the wider the panorama with which the child interacts; conversely, the smaller the window, the smaller the panorama. Gaarder then proceeded to compare submersion into an all-English curriculum to the closing of the window, eliminating the interaction of the child with the environment, therefore precluding any learning. Gaarder would relate the minority language to a blue window, and the English language to a rose window. The language minority child who had used the blue window for communicating with the environment would be placed in a closed room and would be told, "From now on you may no longer use this blue window. You will learn to use the rose window in communicating with your environment." Thereupon the blue window would be covered, and the child would stare at a blank wall. Occasionally a child would say, "I don't see any rose window," and the school would respond, "That's because we haven't built it yet, but keep looking at the blank wall, and we will eventually place a rose window there." Staring at a blank wall does little to develop any learning, or the capacity for learning. Bilingual programs allow for continued learning as well as the continued increase in the capacity for learning as the transition to a new language is being made.

Importance of Native Language Utilization

For some undetermined reasons, commentators on the education of language minority children frequently appear obsessed with the concept of immediate transition to an all-English language curriculum. Though the school should be concerned with the immediate and extensive development of English language usage, there are dangers in discontinuing the use of the native language too soon. One hears educators and laypersons recommending that the school should discontinue the utilization of the native language as soon as the child has a basic understanding of English. The danger in this practice is that a basic understanding of English is frequently determined by measures of the child's ability to communicate in social situations, which is far from the level of language utilization needed for learning activities.

The use of the native language does not preclude the learning of English; on the contrary, research shows that it enhances it.

A Hispanic member of the Texas University Coordinating Board expressed opposition to bilingual education on the basis that it can become a crutch for Hispanic children. Well, crutches are very useful implements when there is a need for them. Crutches can provide support until such time as the body overcomes trauma and can function without them. It is true that the use of crutches can be overextended beyond the time of need, but if one were to err in determining the time of need, most orthopedic specialists would likely prefer that the error be in favor of overuse rather than underuse. The same is true for native language utilization.

The use of the native language does not preclude the learning of English; on the contrary, research shows that it enhances it. Therefore, rather than risk premature restriction of native language usage and the accompanying loss of language and communication capability, I would recommend continuation of native language utilization until there is complete assurance of sufficient English language mastery.

Each person at any point in time has a quantity of language which has been acquired over the years. This quantity of language has a close and cyclic relationship with intellect. People with high intelligence have a large language capacity; people with large language capacity develop high intelligence. A small portion of this language is rather superficial; that is, it is apparent, readily available, and commonly used in everyday social situations such as, "I am fine, thank you. How are you?" Each person also has a much larger quantity of language which is more sophisticated, technical, and not commonly used in social situations. The relationship between the two "types" of language has been described as analagous to an iceberg where only the tip can be seen above the water, leaving the larger bulk well-hidden below the water line.

Failure to allow sufficient language development before transition will result in the child being unable to cope with anything but the most shallow levels of learning and will impact on the future capability for learning.

In learning situations the learner continuously uses language for discovery. In fact, the individual's entire language capacity may be utilized in a learning situation. Determining language development and the capacity for its use in learning on the basis of a working command of the superficial social aspects of language may be detrimental to the learner. The ability to communicate in a

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social situation, such as "I am fine, thank you. How are you?", does not guarantee the existence of the sophisticated, technical language necessary for coping with the learning situation.

Educators believe that at least six years of language development are desirable to allow children to acquire a minimal language reservoir before starting the learning of basic skills in the first grade. Research shows that language minority children may require several years in building the same minimal language reservoir before being able to cope with an all-English language curriculum. Failure to allow sufficient language development before transition will result in the child being unable to cope with anything but the most shallow levels of learning and will impact on the future capability for learning.

One of the most impressive movies I have ever seen is *The Miracle Worker*. It is the story of Helen Keller's early life and her tutor's attempts to teach her the concept of language. Having a total loss of sight and hearing, Helen Keller is living an animal-like existence, not even cognizant of the existence of language with which she can communicate with her outer world. The climax of the movie occurs when she realizes that the hand movements and spellings which her tutor has been trying to teach her constitute language, a method of interpersonal communication. In that scene we see Helen Keller leave her minimally human existence by acquiring the power of language and her transition into an eager and voracious learner.

The placement of a language minority child in an all-English curriculum before sufficient English language mastery is like running *The Miracle Worker* in reverse. We take an eager and voracious learner and remove the power of language, thereby sentencing the child to an animal-like existence until such time as the child acquires sufficient fluency in a different language.

As educators discover more and more about the role of language in the intellectual development of children, the rationale of bilingual education becomes stronger and stronger. Not only can we prevent academic retardation and negative self-concepts through the use of native language instruction, the whole future capability for learning can be effectively enhanced.

The emerging science of language development substantiates this contention. As educators discover more and more about the role of language in the intellectual development of children, the rationale of bilingual education becomes stronger and stronger. Not only can we prevent academic retardation and negative self-concepts through the use of native language instruction, the whole future capability for learning can be effectively enhanced.

If the pedagogical evidence is so overwhelming, why is it that there appears to be so much opposition to bilingual education and the use of the native language in such programs? The answer to this question cannot and does not rest in pedagogy. Without exception, all experts in language development and second language acquisition concur regarding the advantages of native language utilization. The reason must lie elsewhere.

Criticisms of Bilingual Education

After reviewing scores of criticisms on the use of native language in bilingual education programs, I concluded that these criticisms generally fell into one or more of three areas, in that they were either of an emotional, misinformational, or attitudinal nature.

As stated previously, much of the criticism of bilingual programs stems from negative emotional reactions elicited by the concept of using a language other than English for instructional programs in American schools. Reactions range from the affirmative ethnicity of Noel Epstein to the religious objection of Ma Ferguson, "If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it ought to be good enough for the children of Texas." Unfortunately, there is little that can be done to diffuse these strong emotional reactions. Because the source of the irritation is not rational but rather emotional, rational argument does little good. If a true-blue American patriot feels it is un-American to speak a language other than English, there is little ground for argument. When I ask the question, "Which is less patriotic, to allow a child to develop his intellect using a language other then English or to allow a child to grow up deficient in all language and reasoning skills because of an English language limitation needlessly imposed?" the common response has been to perpetuate the limitation. It is no small wonder that so much of the implementation of bilingual education programs has come about as a result of equal protection litigation and civil rights legislation rather than public support.

It is interesting to note that public school educators have not been exempt from leaning on emotional responses. The preservation of sacred cows has frequently taken precedence over the need for instructional reform.

Throughout the criticisms of bilingual education one hears the insinuation that advocates of the system are persons who have a vested interest in bilingualism and who stand to gain financially or professionally through their involvement in bilingual education programs. This is not so. Practitioners in bilingual education have additional training in the area, but perform in positions which are comparable to traditional instructional approaches. The leadership in bilingual education achieved their leadership positions in traditional programs. If bilingual education advocacy has had an impact on financial or professional status, I would speculate that the impact has been negative.

. . . articles dealing with bilingual education tend to be short, uninformative, and downgraded. On the other hand, criticisms of bilingual education are considered controversial, interesting, and given top coverage.

If negative emotional responses are the main source of criticisms of bilingual programs, then misinformation

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must rank a close second. In a recent newspaper article critical of bilingual education almost every other sentence had erroneous information in it. Though it is tempting to conclude that advocates of bilingual education have not done a good job of defining and describing this educational methodology, the fault goes much deeper. The public media has consistently failed to give extensive coverage to what they perceive as educational material and therefore not very newsworthy. As a result, articles dealing with bilingual education tend to be short, uninformative, and downgraded. On the other hand, criticisms of bilingual education are considered controversial, interesting, and given top coverage. An article on the shortcomings of bilingual education received converage in the media, including front page headlines in several prominent newspapers. Subsequent articles on the scandalous methodology used in the study which produced the original article received little or no coverage. If reported in the printed media, it was usually found in the back pages close to the classified ads.

Additionally, much of the misinformation which surfaces about bilingual education is the creation of emotionally responsive critics. It is not unusual for an article criticizing bilingual education to state or imply that native language is being used in lieu of English language acquisition. This is simply not so. An emotional writer in the *San Antonio Light* states, "In many instances, according to reliable published reports, their teachers (of limited English proficient children) are more dedicated to teaching them the correct and literary form of their native language than teaching them English." Again, this is not so. I have observed bilingual classrooms in at least twenty different states, and I have never seen teachers neglect the teaching of English language in bilingual programs. Furthermore, I have reviewed hundreds of reports on bilingual programs from school districts, state education agencies, federal agencies, the Department of Education, etc. and have never seen a report, let alone a reliable report of the practice described in the article. I challenge the author to show me one (just one) report which shows one case (just one case) in which a bilingual education teacher was found dedicating more time to the correct and literary form of the native language than to the instruction of English as a second language.

The emotional responses to bilingual education sometimes get so intense that they defy all reason. For example, on two occasions I have read articles in which the writers object to the use of the phrase "English as a second language." The argument presented in both cases is that English is the greatest language on earth and therefore second to none. How does one argue with such an individual that the word "second" refers to a chronological order, and that in the case of a native speaker of a language other than English, English will always follow the native language chronologically.

The third area of criticism of bilingual education is a difficult subject to deal with. As our country has already entered and exited the era of civil rights and equal educational opportunity and the word "racist" has been abandoned as no longer an "in word," one is limited in what can be said about certain attitudes toward language minority children. However, it seems obvious that when one argues about the pedagogical rationale of bilingual education and the need for native language instruction to prevent educational retardation, to enhance self-concept as a prerequisite of learning, and the need for existing language utilization to continue cognitive development, there are some hard-core opponents whose opposition is neither emotional nor pedagogical. This opposition is based on past discriminatory attitudes about the place of racial and ethnic minorities and the belief held by some that equal educational opportunity is not desirable.

It appears that some people are saying that a basic command of the English language is sufficient and should be the desired educational outcome for language minority children. They agree that it is well and good to afford these children an English as a second language program which allows them to develop sufficient language and intellectual skills to understand and follow basic instructions, allows them to earn a decent living, and prevents them from becoming a social liability. But do not go so far as to develop language and intellectual skills to the point that it disrupts the social order. First thing you know their children will be competing with our children for admission to medical schools, they will be wanting political offices, and they will be wanting managerial and supervisory positions. This attitude was manifested by the reaction of some community leaders to the introduction of Title I Migrant Education programs in the 1960s. Their viewpoint was expressed as, "If you give them so much education, they won't want to pick crops for a living."

It appears that some people are saying that a basic command of the English language is sufficient and should be the desired educational outcome for language minority children.

Educators frequently express parallel negative attitudes about language minority children. For the past five years, the strongest controversy about bilingual education has been the determination of what constitutes acceptable performance for removal from a native language support program.

A recent newspaper item critical of bilingual education also exemplified this attitude. The writer had visited a high school class made up of Asian immigrant children and observed that without native language instruction the students appeared to be doing fine. She stated that they had a basic understanding of the English language and could communicate with each other in simple English. It seems to me that high school students are not supposed to be communicating with each other in simple English. They are supposed to be communicating about algebra, geometry, physics, and social studies. They are supposed to be reaching near adult levels of cognition, affective development, and aesthetic appreciation.

Educators frequently express parallel negative

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attitudes about language minority children. For the past five years, the strongest controversy about bilingual education has been the determination of what constitutes acceptable performance for removal from a native language support program. Though the 50th percentile on standardized tests is considered average performance for English speaking children, the state education agency was adamant on lowering the acceptable level of performance for language minority children from the 40th percentile to the 23rd percentile. The 23rd percentile is close to the score a person can make on a standardized test by guessing at the answers without even looking at the questions. With such low racist levels of expectancy, it is amazing that minority children perform as well as they do.

So much of the criticism of bilingual education comes from emotional responses, misinformation, and racist attitudes, that one must make a conscious effort to look at criticism objectively.

So much of the criticism of bilingual education comes from emotional responses, misinformation, and racist attitudes, that one must make a conscious effort to look at criticism objectively. It is dangerous to formulate an immediate reaction without a constraining question, "Is the critic emotional, ignorant, or racist?" Yet the vast majority of criticism does fall into one or more of these basic classifications.

I see bilingual education as the best approach for teaching the English language without academic retardation, with the minimum development of negative concepts of self, and with the maximum development of the intellectual potential of the individual.

The Efficacy of Bilingual Education

In spite of all the criticism being heard about bilingual education programs and the use of native language instruction for language minority children, I continue to be a strong advocate of this methodology. I see bilingual education as the best approach for teaching the English language without academic retardation, with the minimum development of negative concepts of self, and with the maximum development of the intellectual potential of the individual. In my 34 years as a professional educator working with language minority children, I have not found a better alternative. I will look into alternative approaches, although I see the current push for experimental alternative programs as more of an attempt to establish loopholes for complying with current law and regulations rather than serious educational experimentation. Certainly current efforts to provide an alternative which consists of the traumatic and disastrous programs of the pre-bilingual era have not been, can not be, and will not be acceptable to me. Bilingual education with native language instruction still appears the best option for children with limited English proficiency.